

## The Challenge: Applicant Overload

It is no longer unusual for a company advertising a junior or mid-level white-collar job opening to find itself deluged by more than a hundred applicants, more than half of whom fail to meet even the basic minimum qualifications clearly specified in the advertisement. Left unresolved, this information overload bloats time to hire, and can even cost you a shot at top candidates.

## How Pre-Screening Questions Work

A growing number of ATSS and online job boards allow recruiters to build online questionnaires which applicants are required to answer before they are permitted to submit their resume. In some cases, responses to questions are used to “disqualify” candidates from applying altogether. In others, numeric scores are assigned to each answer, and recruiters are able to view the applicant pool sorted by score.

## Abandoned Applications and Adverse Selection

Far from improving hire quality, pre-screening questions can actually reduce the quality of your overall applicant pool. In general, the more steps there are in the application process, the fewer people who will actually complete it. Moreover, it will discourage precisely the people you most want to reach: currently-employed and “passive” job-seekers. The underqualified and unemployed will of course jump through any number of hoops you set up. So not only do you get fewer applicants, you get worse ones!

## The Problem of “Fake Good”

“Do you have three years of experience as a Java developer,” a typical pre-screening question asks. “Of course,” the recent college graduate answers, “I’ve been using Java for four years.” Most pre-screening questions fail because they require the respondent to evaluate themselves the same way you would evaluate them. Applicants are not stupid: they can tell when questions are being used to filter them out, and will stretch the truth as much as necessary. Getting around this requires the use of longer surveys with overlapping questions. These are not only difficult to design, but the added hassle for applicants raises the adverse selection specter even further.

## When Requirements Change

Another problem with pre-screening questions is that you can only ask them once. If, after receiving 60 resumes from people who answered all your questions, the hiring manager tells you about a new requirement, you are out of luck. The same goes for database searches: unless you pre-screen every applicant for a very wide range of requirements, future searches will be limited to the lowest common denominator of questions that you asked every applicant.

## Ease-of-Use

Pre-screening questions need to be carefully designed by hand, often for each requisition, prior to receiving a single applicant. If you wish to use scoring mechanisms to rank candidates, you must also specify the scoring of the questions as well. For a large enterprise that may hire dozens or hundreds of people for an identical position in a year, this is no big deal, but smaller companies already pressed for resources hardly need another task added to their plates.

## What About Assessments?

A growing number of companies are using a more comprehensive type of candidate testing tool to carry out detailed assessment of candidate skills and/or personality traits prior to making a hiring decision. Designed by expert researchers, these tools may bear a resemblance to pre-screening questions but are in an entirely different class. For instance, rather than asking the candidate “How skilled do you consider yourself,” they ask 25-50 subject-specific questions which measure the respondent’s skills objectively. These tools can prove useful, but due to their cost (\$35 or more per test per applicant) and the time commitment required, they are really more of a supplement to an in-person interview than a pre-screening tool.

## Resume Grading: Easier, Faster, Better

HRMDirect’s **Resume Direct** applicant tracking system provides the ability to pre-screen candidates based entirely on the contents of the resume they submit. Integrating the most powerful resume parsing and search software available today, **Resume Direct** users can sort applicants into groups based on objective, universal, and foolproof criteria. Most importantly, this approach addresses all of the key failures inherent in the use of pre-screening questions:

- **No abandoned applications:** With **Resume Direct**, all the applicant needs to do is email a resume. No pre-screening questions are required.
- **Eliminates “fake good” answers:** Applicants are assessed on the contents of their resumes, and not on easily-fooled questions
- **Change requirements anytime:** Because **Resume Direct** uses the applicant’s own resume, recruiters can change requirements and re-grade the applicant pool on-the-fly
- **Simpler to use:** No need to build surveys before posting the job. **Resume Direct** grades candidates based on the same requirements you specify in the job description, so you already know how to use it.

## Key Questions To Ask Any Vendor

**Can your system support screening of applicants without the use of surveys or pre-screening questions?**

**Can applicants apply by email or directly through the job board, or do they have to link to your site (and pay an additional job posting fee) in order to fill out a form and answer a survey?**

**Does your system rank candidates into clear groups based on specific requirements, so that you can easily prepare applicant flow logs or EEO reports, or does it simply assign a numeric score?**

**Can you search the database for candidates based on conceptual criteria (such as “IT experience”) or only by specific keywords?**